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SUBJECT: TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO POLITICAL ROUND-UP, SEPTEMBER 26, 2007

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED; PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

11. (U) In this edition of the Roundup:

- 1A. CARICOM TEAM TO MONITOR ELECTION
- 1B. TRADE UNIONS SUCCESSFUL IN SOLIDARITY
- 1C. MP WINS FIGHT TO BE SCREENED FOR OFFICE
- 1D. CHIEF JUSTICE TRIBUNAL SNARES MORE

CARICOM TEAM TO MONITOR ELECTION

12. (U) During an address to the House of Representatives on September 21, Prime Minister Manning said he will invite a Caricom delegation to observe Trinidad and Tobago's upcoming election. Although he said he has no doubt the elections will be fair, this approach would add international credibility to the final result and be a concrete sign of regional integration and cooperation.

13. (U) Manning stated his move was not related to the Congress of the People's (COP) demand for observers. In response to Manning's announcement, COP leader Winston Dookeran said he still hoped the Commonwealth Secretariat would be asked to form an observer mission. Explaining this preference, he characterized the Commonwealth group as more experienced at election monitoring. Dookeran also has called for the OAS to send observers, but indicated he could live with just Commonwealth and Caricom monitoring.

(SBU) Comment: Electoral lore has the PNM employing some "muscle" in the 2002 election. Some in the opposition have suggested the ruling PNM would use workers from the publicly-funded CEPEP employment program in a similar manner. By offering up Caricom observers, Manning has defused this issue, at least over the short-term. For his part, Dookeran has sent letters to some local Commonwealth Embassies seeking their backing for an observer mission. A couple of those Embassies told us they did not intend to get involved in this dispute. END COMMENT.

TRADE UNION SUCCESS

14. (U) On September 21, hundreds of disgruntled public servants from various trade unions marched through Port of Spain in a show of solidarity. Participants demanded that the government and public sector employers finish labor negotiations before the upcoming elections. Most public employees are barred from striking, but teachers/others in contract talks have been engaged in work actions, including "sick-outs."

15. (U) During the rally, leaders from the teachers union announced that after a year of negotiations, a settlement with the GOTT had been reached. By December, teachers will begin receiving salary

adjustments designed to bring many of them to 100% parity with equivalent private sector workers.

(SBU) COMMENT: The PNM is striving to wrap up all public sector negotiations before the elections. END COMMENT.

MP WINS FIGHT TO BE SCREENED FOR OFFICE

¶16. (U) According to several media reports, on September 27, PNM MP Ken Valley will be screened as a candidate for the upcoming general elections. The central executive committee made this decision, ending a fierce internal debate with PM Manning who had sought to replace Valley along with about half of the PNM's current sitting MPs. Valley, a senior PNM figure, has been supported by many of his constituents and others in the PNM structure. Screening, however, does not necessarily equate to being selected as an MP candidate and his fate may not be known until Friday.

¶17. (SBU) Comment: After Valley's fate is determined, along with that of five other MP hopefuls, the PNM will have completed its candidate selection process, making it "good to go" for convoking the elections. In addition, on September 28 the PM will prorogue this session of Parliament (though there is a slim possibility it could be brought back into session for a brief period prior to October 16 when it legally must dissolve). Speculation is rampant Manning will announce the date of elections on September 28; he must do so by October 16. END COMMENT.

CHIEF JUSTICE CASE A MEDIA CIRCUS

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¶18. (U) The first week of testimony in the Chief Justice (CJ) Satnarine Sharma case has led to a media circus, with stories of alleged corruption and high level judicial intrigue filling newspapers. Sharma is accused of trying to influence a case against former PM and current UNC opposition leader Basdeo Panday (his case involved the non-declaration of a London bank account). Sharma's defense team is seeking to discredit his main accuser, suspended Chief Magistrate (CM) Sherman McNicolls, by saying the CM took a significant bribe when handling the Panday case. Thrown into the mix this week is Attorney General John Jeremie, who Sharma's attorneys are painting as a McNicolls co-conspirator.

AUSTIN